

Spring/Summer 2014 Book Reviews

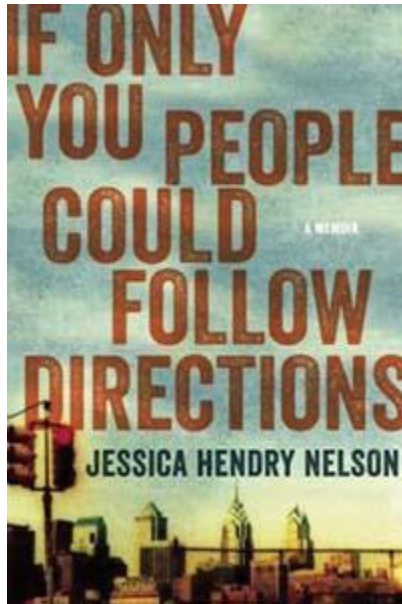
Books by UNH alumni and faculty members

Thursday, June 19, 2014

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If Only You People Could Follow Directions

Her brother's keeper



At a grandfather's funeral, Jessica Hendry Nelson '06 finds her brother dressed in a yellow jumpsuit and handcuffs. After the service, other mourners go to the cemetery. Eric, serving time for theft, heads back to jail in a police van.

This remarkable scene crystalizes a recurring theme of *If Only You People Could Follow Directions* (Counterpoint, 2014), a collection of linked autobiographical essays about a rough-and-tumble childhood and its aftereffects in early adulthood. Growing up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Nelson lived by her wits as, time and again, the important people in her life were physically or mentally absent. Her father spent years away from home—in jail, rehab, or a halfway house--and died when she was in high school. Her

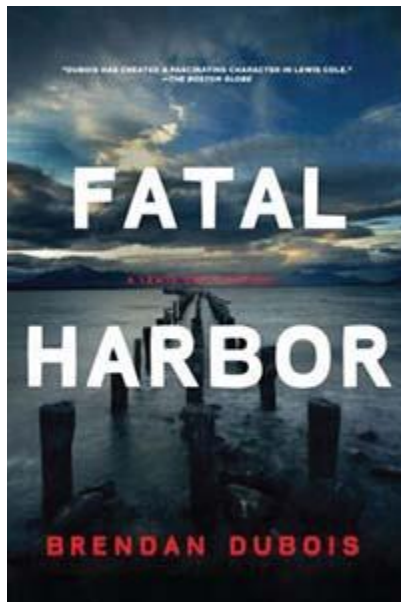
mother drank and carried a case in her purse with marijuana and a glass pipe. Eric, diagnosed with bipolar disorder, survived a heroin overdose.

Hendry Nelson tells her story in an impressionistic, nonlinear style that jump-cuts back and forth in time and space as she maps the psychological carnage, especially that caused by a brother whom she loves but from whom she has had to distance herself for her own well-being. She at first blamed herself for some of Eric's crises, but over time realized their roles had been "written in our DNA."

A turning point seems to have occurred after she left home—first for UNH, then for graduate school at Sarah Lawrence and ultimately for life in Vermont with a man who offered the stability her family couldn't provide. In her Acknowledgments, Hendry Nelson credits UNH teachers Andy Merton and Meredith Hall for giving her "the tools and encouragement that have sustained me these many years." But she wisely avoids the unnaturally rosy tone of memoirists who imply that the effects of troubled childhoods don't linger. She seems instead to share the guarded hope of a professor who told her, "We find what sustains us, and if we are very careful, or very lucky, we do not lose it."

Fatal Harbor

A New Hampshire mystery



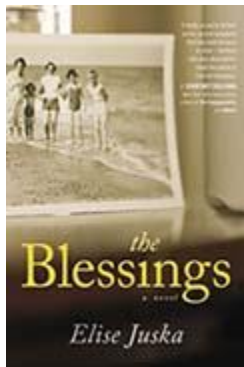
Why isn't suspense novelist Brendan DuBois '82 better known? Perhaps fittingly, it's a mystery.

Consider a few of the honors won by DuBois, the author of 16 novels and more than 120 short stories. One of his stories appeared in *The Best American Mystery Stories of the Century* along with work by O. Henry, Raymond Chandler, and Flannery O'Connor. Another earned him a spot in *The Best American Noir of the Century*, which included fiction by Elmore Leonard, Dennis Lehane, and Joyce Carol Oates. And yet he lacks the fame of the literary superstars with whom he keeps company in anthologies.

DuBois may catch up if his books remain as engaging as his eighth mystery about the New Hampshire-based amateur sleuth Lewis Cole. *Fatal Harbor* (Pegasus, 2014) is a snappy, fast-paced sequel to the 2011 *Deadly Cove* that ended with Cole's best friend, police detective Diane Woods, in a coma after a vicious assault outside a local power plant. In his latest outing, Cole remains outraged by the attack and sets out to find the assailant. His early stops include Durham, where he seeks out a UNH student who has ties to the anti-nuclear activist with who injured his friend. The young woman links a UNH philosophy instructor to the violent protestors.

Cole follows leads from Washington, D.C., to the White Mountains, and faces escalating threats to his life from a killer with a radical political agenda. Part of the fun of his story lies in guessing the identities of the fictionalized New Hampshire spots he visits: Is the Falconer nuclear power plant Seabrook? Was the Lafayette House hotel inspired by Wentworth-by-the-Sea? DuBois provides clues that, if you still aren't sure, may inspire you to do some sleuthing of your own.

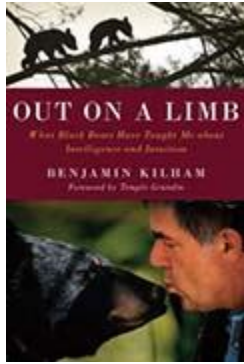
Of Note



The Blessings

by Elise Jaska '97G

Grand Central Publishing, 2014



Out on a Limb: What Black Bears Have Taught Me About Intelligence and Intuition
 by Ben Kilham '74
 Chelsea Green Publishing, 2013



Toxic Staple: How Gluten May Be Wrecking Your Health—And What You Can Do about It!
 by Anne Sarkisian '64
 Max Health Press, 2013

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